New York University-Gallatin School  
Spring 2017  
ELEC-GG 2544

Course : Fiction Inside Out-Workshop  Fall 2016  ELEC-GG 2544  
Time : Friday: 3:30 – 6:10 pm  
Place : Room 401, 1 Washington Place (The Gallatin Building)  
Instructor : Meera Nair  
Email : Mn379@nyu.edu  
Office and Hours: Room 508, 1 Washington Place, 2:00-3:00 pm

Description:  
A graduate-level workshop on the writing, reading and critiquing of fiction.  
In this craft-oriented workshop, we will identify and practice the essential technical elements of fiction writing. We will look under the hood, take the back off the clock, peer into the innards, in order to study the formal decisions necessary for effective story-telling. Our inquiry will include point of entry; character and plot; creating meaningful scenes; inferiority v/s external action; exposition; the management of time; the position of the narrator; linear v/s modular design; dialogue and its uses; conflict and resolution; image systems and so on. Fun exercises that encourage play, class readings, technique essays and student work will be points of departure for our enquiries into the internal workings of fiction.

Learning goals:  
- demonstrate increasing skill with the process of analyses and critical response to their own work and that of their peers in a workshop context;  
- demonstrate higher order understanding of critical craft concepts deployed in fiction;  
- explain how these concepts contribute to a text's literary, aesthetic and emotional effects;  
- create 2-3 extended pieces of original fiction that demonstrate complexity through attention to the elements of fiction, as well as language and style.  
- learn to read, comment and write constructively and critically on the creative writing of peers in the workshop context.  
- develop solid skills around revision and editing techniques and produce reasoned, perceptive responses to assigned texts.  
- demonstrate the ability to respond to constructive critique from instructor and peers by effectively revising writing assignments.  
- Participate in writing related activities such as readings and talks.

Texts: In Dropbox. The texts are separated into two folders. 1. Craft Essays 2. Stories  
Look for an an invite in your box.

Expectations:  
- Final:  
  1. A Creative Portfolio of thoroughly revised 2-3 extended pieces of fiction that amount to 25-30 pages
3. An informal letter of at least 500 words assessing your development as a fiction writer and reader
- writing exercises
- short written reflections on published writers,
- cogent, persuasive 1-page workshop responses for peers
- Contributions to class discussions and workshops
- Attendance at readings, panels, performances

Grades:

In calculating your final grade I will consider:

1. The quality and frequency of your engagement with and commentary on the material presented in class
2. The progress made on your own writing and understanding and application of various narrative elements
3. The seriousness and depth of your revisions on your own stories.
4. The enthusiasm with which you engage with the work of your peers.

If we see writing and reading as practices, we must consider creative-writing courses process courses. The following grading breakdown should be read with this idea in mind.

- Final Portfolio—50 percent
- Responses/letters to your peers—30 percent
- Participation—20 percent

Creative Portfolio:

You are to submit around 25-30 pages of substantially revised, cleanly edited works of fiction(stories or chapters) at the end of the semester. This could be 3 Stories of 10 pages each, several shorter stories or chapters, the point is you are aiming to produce substantial work. You may work on them throughout the semester.

When I say that the work should be “substantially revised” and “cleanly edited,” I mean that they should be aggressively and repeatedly rewritten, and brought to the most fully realized form that you can manage by the semester’s end. Do not be afraid to make large changes—in point of view, plot, or voice, for example. All creative pieces should be as free as you can make them of accidental mechanical errors (as opposed to intentional, effective manipulations of grammar and spelling). Use MLA format.

(Note: If you hand in chapters, include a brief synopsis of the novel and explain where the chapters fall within the book and make sure they are self-contained, in that they do not make too many references to stuff that's happening in other parts of the book.)
Attendance and Participation:
Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. It is your responsibility to create and take advantage of this community of readers, thinkers and writers by coming prepared to class having read and thought about the material we are discussing, by having drafts completed on time, contributing to class discussion and being respectful, thoughtful and responsive listeners. Workshopping is hugely important to advanced writer's like you, so please take it seriously and treat the work of your peers with the same diligence and respect you accord your own. I expect you to contribute something relevant and meaningful to class discussion in every class. I will be calling on people randomly to volunteer responses too, but it will be your responsibility to make sure you are contributing weekly, even if you are only asking questions. Failure to participate can significantly lower your grade (plus it's disrespectful to your fellow writers).

Absences:
Please count on coming to every single class this semester. Missing a class of this length is equivalent to missing a week of classes. However, I am aware that emergencies intervene. You will be allowed two absences for any reason (lateness, illness, family emergency, etc.) before I begin marking you down. **If you are not in class when I take attendance you are marked absent.** Please note that if you leave the classroom for five or more minutes after class has begun, you will be marked late or absent accordingly. In case of personal and medical emergencies, you should contact me, or the appropriate authority in your department.

2 excused absences – No impact  
Every additional absences – points lowered off your final grade  
4 or more absences – You will fail the course.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is defined as “Using a phrase, sentence, passage, image, graph, table, sound recording, artwork, or any other type of creative or intellectual material from another work without proper citation; paraphrasing words or ideas from another work without attribution; reporting as your own research or knowledge any data or idea gathered, reported, or developed by another person; submitting as your own work anything produced by another. Plagiarism does not only apply to written or recorded work, but also to intellectual property such as computer programs, oral presentations, and artistic work including choreography, stage blocking, and music.”

Illicit Collaboration: submitting work done in collaboration with others without the express permission of the instructor or without acknowledging such collaboration.

Doubling or Recycling: submitting the same or substantially similar work in multiple courses, either in the same semester or in a different semester, without the express approval of all instructors.

More [here](#)

Syllabus

Nothing below this line is set in stone. Readings/exercises may change in response to class needs.

Workshop Schedule: The schedule is flexible and can be adapted according to the size of the class. At the very least I hope to give you opportunities to workshop your work at least twice.

Each student will have opportunities to present work (and revisions of that work in the final). Plan now
to make your deadlines and have substantial work to put up for class. Work will be distributed IN CLASS for the next week; please plan ahead; if you are submitting work, attend class with the required number of copies for yourself, your classmates, and the instructor.

Each workshop, please bring edited copies of the stories being discussed that week to class with 2 copies of a one page, single-spaced, typed critique, which will be the basis of your classroom discussion. One copy of the critique will be given to the author to aid in his/her revision. Please use the Workshop Guide as a reference for your critique. In your critique you should aim to be kind, but honest. Think of yourself as being part of an editorial board for your fellow writer, so please line edit, comment in the margins and so on. Your edit should help your fellow writer revise the work. Think of workshop letters as a chance to hone your editing skills.

Each writer knows her/his deadlines far in advance. Please plan to make your deadlines. The aim of the workshop is to help the work reach final form and to workshop a revision of at least three stories. Please try to move beyond first draft in your submissions of new work; the work you turn in to class should be work you have generated for this class, revised and edited yourself at least once. Please do not submit work previously submitted to other workshops.

If you are not present on the day your story is being workshopped, you will forfeit your workshop.

Provisional Syllabus

All readings should have been completed before the class meeting. If the syllabus says the text is Yearning by Butler for Sept. 16, it means you would have already read and thought about the texts BEFORE you come into class that day.

Because each class is different and has different needs, the following outline may change. All stories, craft articles and handouts are in the Dropbox link that I will invite you to share on the first day of class.

All assignments are to be handed in typed, paginated and stapled.

Syllabus

Week 1 – January 27
Introductions
Course structure
Read in class: Say Yes
Interviewing your classmate
Analysis+ writing: Michael Ondaatje's 7 or 8 Things I Know about her.

Week 2 – February 3: Character
Due: Your version of 7 or 8 things I knew about ---- (revised)

Readings: Folder marked Feb 3:

2. Stories: We did not like him, Akhil Sharma
What have you done? Ben Marcus
3. **Questions** on Characterization (Handout 1). Choose any ONE question and write down answers with examples from these stories to discuss in class.

**Homework:** Due Feb 10th

Read **Handout 2: Character Descriptions**

Now write ONE paragraph of your own. You may use your observations of your classmate you interviewed, but follow these instructions:

- change the gender of your classmate—which means you may use some physical characteristics but may have to invent others
- Invent her/his/their clothes
- invent a backstory that you can use in your paragraph (like Billy in the last description)

b. **Assignment 2 (HW):** Look closely at the Sharma and the Marcus stories. Identify a moment/scene when the protagonist (the main character in the story) makes his yearning/desire clear.

Write a short scene for your character (from assignment 1a.) in which we see a moment when your character's desire becomes manifest. Your scene should be able to answer the question, “What does this protagonist want? **Around 500 words**

Week 3 – February 10: Openings

**Assignment 1 and 2 (on character) due – bring 3 copies to class**

Stories:

*The Courthouse*, Tamima Anam (complete chapter)

*The Fat Girl*, Dubus (complete story)

Openings and closings PDF – read only the 1st page of *The Jewish Hunter, In the Land of Men, What feels like the World.*

Handout 3: Some openings to look at

**Assignment 3 (openings): In class** (bring a laptop to class)

a. Please choose TWO openings and type them out (5 sentences each). Follow each with a short statement on why you chose them/ and what you thought they were doing for the story/the reader.

b. Write TWO different 1 page openings using the exercise (Handout 4) They should be vivid and compelling, introduce a character, locate him/her in a space and have some of the characteristics I describe in the exercise in handout 4.

Revise at home and email me on Monday 13, 2017

Week 4 – Feb 17 Place: Field visit

Follow instructions in the Place Prompt (Dropbox)

**Assignment 4 Due: Wednesday  Feb 22, 2017 (Emailed to me before 5.00 pm)**

**Readings: Stories:** *Hitting Budapest*, Violet Bulawayo

*There will come soft rains*, Bradbury

**Craft:** *Place*, by Dorothy Allison, *A Sense of Place* by Eudora Welty.

**Week 5 - Feb 24 TBA**
Week 6 – March 3 Scene

Readings:

Craft: *The Scene Beast is Hungry*, C.J. Hrijbal, *Making a Scene*, Anne Keasey

Writing: (HW) **Assignment 5** (due March 10) Write an opening scene of a story growing out of this question: “Where were you last night?” This is only an opening scene (it needs to be a scene) so do not exceed 1-3 double spaced pages. **OR if you like:** Write a scene for your story. Whatever you chose to do, use dialogue, action and a clearly identifiable turning point. Your reader should be able to pinpoint the change that takes place.

Week 7 - March 10 Plot and Narrative

Assignment 5 due

Craft: *Incremental Perturbations: How to know if you have a plot or not*, John Barth
Stories:

*Helping*, Robert Stone (467-495)
*My Son the Fanatic*, Kureshi
*Patriotism*, Yukio Mishima

Handout: Questions for thinking about plot
Refer to Plot Prompt for HW Assignment 6
**Group 1 submits**

Week 8 – March 17 Spring Break

Don't forget to write

Week 9 – March 24 Dialogue

Stories: *Edgemont Drive*, Doctorow

*The Gilgul of Park Avenue*, Englander

Follow Prompt for Journaling on Dialogue
Read: Workshop Guidelines

Workshop: Group 1

Group 2 submits

Week 10 – March 31 Emotion

*A Time for Kissing*, Robinson
*So much water under the Bridge*, Carver
*A Distant Episode*, Bowles

Prompt for Journaling on Emotion

Workshop: Group 2

Group 3 submits
Week 11 April 7 – Flash Fiction
Read: Stories: Axolotl, Cortazar, Woman, fish Dorothy Tse
Workshop Group 3
Group 1 submits (second round)
Follow prompt for journaling on flash fiction

Week 12 April 14 - Detail
Craft: Detail, James Wood
Story: In other rooms, other wonders, Daniyal Muenuddin
Workshop Group 1
Group 2 submits (second round)

Week 13 April 21 - Revision
Read: On Revision – Chris Offut
Workshop Group 2
Group 3 submits
You may submit your journal

Week 14 April 28
Revision – in class work
workshop group 3

Week 15 May 5 last day
PORTFOLIO DUE
Publishing your Work